

**Tara Visualisation Meditation**  
**Lesson Five**  
**Geshe Lobsang Dhonyoe**  
**Thursday August 11, 2016**  
**Dhargyey Buddhist Centre**

**21 Praises of Tara**

I thought of us practicing singing 21 praises of Tara in a beautiful way before Losang goes. But I think some explanation is more important than singing.

In the photo that we have there are 22 Taras, but when you recite 21 praises of Tara there are 21 stanzas. There is no harm in that the central Tara is the main Tara and all other 21 Taras around her in this picture, they are different facets of the same reality. In Tibetan Buddhist logic there is a term 'one nature, different isolates;' in other words, they are of the same reality with different facets.

As well, when you say the names of Tara you get only 21 names. If you have this book on page 155, [We'll go through the names of the 21 Taras]:

1. Heroic Tara.
2. Autumn moon-like white Tara.
3. Golden hue Tara – golden Tara.
4. All victorious Tara.
5. HUM-proclaiming Tara. In other words the Tara who issues the syllabic mantra HUM.
6. Triple-world-victorious Tara. Tara who is victorious in the three realms.
7. Tara who subdues, control many foes and hostile forces.
8. All-demon conquering Tara.
9. Supreme siddhi bestowing Tara. This is the queen Tara, the main Tara.
10. Sorrow-relieving Tara.
11. Poverty-eradicating Tara. Whatever poverty of wisdom, riches and health, whatever you are lacking you suffer from, this Tara will help.
12. All good-fortune holding Tara. Tara who holds all that is of good and is auspicious.
13. All ripening Tara. (When fruit ripens, it ripens by itself. In the Tibetan context it is a transitive connotation – Tara brings you to maturation). Tara who brings to maturation.
14. [Losang could not translate]
15. Tara from whom peace arises.
16. Attachment-vanquishing Tara.
17. Tara who achieves all that is good, all that is joyful. All joy-accomplishing Tara.
18. Completely victorious, totally victorious Tara.
19. All suffering-eliminating Tara. Tara who eliminates all suffering.
20. All siddhi-bestowing Tara.
21. All consummating Tara. All-completing Tara.

These are the names of 21 Taras, who are multifarious facets of the main Tara. Her right hand is extending down on the right knee, showing the palm upward and holding lotus by the stem between the thumb and index finger. That gesture symbolises an act of showing the path from mundane existence to the state of a Buddha. It also symbolises her promise that she made to all the Buddhas to help them on the path to Buddhahood.

The left hand is raised to heart level and holding again a lotus by the stem between the ring finger and the thumb. This mudra is called refuge-granting mudra or gesture. According to the reading, this gesture of the hand of Tara symbolises her swift reaction to the call of people in tight vulnerable situations, like running into wild animals like wild cats if you're on a safari or facing elemental calamities like a bush fire, tsunami, earthquakes and so on. Whenever you are in tight situations, if you can think of Tara [she will come to help] as she promised the assembly of Buddhas and she has delivered innumerable times.

Some of the fearful tight corners or situations include facing, encountering your worst enemy in very tight corner or situation; running into a lion and elephant and so on; and facing all types of elemental destructive forces. The three fingers are pointing upright and these three fingers represent the three jewels, saying that she is also of the nature of three jewels: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

She holds in her left hand an utpala or blue lotus, held by the stem. There are three flowers: the central one is in bloom and the other two are buds, to signify her omniscience of the three times and events in the three times. You could also talk about the way she sits and her ornaments, crown but I will not able to talk in detail about this. Tara is relied upon by all those who have sought, are seeking and will seek the state of Buddhahood. If you recall the life story of many great beings in the past, behind all great practitioners there is a female Buddha behind them – there is a Tara. All in all, if we have the will to trust her, there is no doubt at all that she will swiftly answer all your calls.

### **The Story of Tara**

The genesis of Tara begins with a princess at some time in the past. She was a princess of a certain king and she was called Yeshe Dawa. Being a princess, she had luxury and she worshipped Buddhas, bodhisattvas, hearers, pratyekabuddhas and so on and gathered merit through various propitiating practices. In time, she experienced a genuine bodhichitta in her own heart; with the catalyst of bodhichitta behind her, it was a swift journey to the state of Buddhahood.

After she gained a great deal of spiritual realisations, in terms of experiencing bodhichitta and gaining an understanding of reality and so on, then a suggestion was made to her by male bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas and so on. They said to her, *“Why don't you now opt for a male life? With your courage, with your determination you'd be able to do more if in the next lifetime you opted to come back in a male body.”*

She said to well-meaning supporters, saying that to date anyone who has been able to do something spiritually for sentient beings has been men, not women. There has never been a woman a publically known woman to have done the same thing as men have done. Therefore she said,

*I want to set a trend today. Until I achieve the state of Buddhahood, from here until then I will retain my female identity and then work for sentient beings as a female guide to the state of Buddhahood.*

Therefore she was the first female practitioner to have set such a goal.

They all acclaimed her ingenuity, her foresight, her determination and true to her promise, she has delivered the goods really. Anyone who turns to Tara for mundane reasons, for spiritual reasons they are never let down. Therefore there is hardly anyone who does not rely on Tara – there is hardly anyone who doesn't need to rely on Tara!

### **Turning for Help**

We have talked about refuge, Buddha Dharma and Sangha, and Tara is the refuge of the Buddha, a female refuge of the Buddha who has a maternal instinct for quick response. If only you have the will to turn to her, as I've said many times, you will never be let down.

Tara practice, the chief aim is for one to move on the path to enlightenment. When you move on the path to enlightenment you need to have longevity, healthy long life. Tara practice also contributes to your enjoying such a healthy long life that you could dedicate to practice. That's one of the reasons that people turn to Tara too.

We recited Tara mantra for his Holiness' long life during the time of his birthday in and around. We dedicated the mantra for his long life and there is no doubt the one million mantra that we contributed to the pool will go a long way in ensuring that he enjoys a long life. For one's own sake too, if you can do Tara practice in the way that I have talked about then it will help you enjoy long life and avert possible crises in life.

However it has to be said despite the fact that it is claimed that Tara is swift in her bestowal and reaction, it has to be said that for one to be helped by Tara, if you don't turn yourself to Tara then it won't happen. Assistance and help that we receive is a two-way process. For Buddhas to help sentient beings, Buddhas can't force sentient beings to follow them. Sentient beings have to want to be helped by Buddha, and on our part we have to want to be helped by Tara. If you don't have that desire to turn to, be helped by Tara then help is not going to come to us since it's a two-way process.

I've given you the image of the sun: when the sun shines it shines equally, everywhere. But for example, if a cave in the southern hemisphere is facing the south, despite a glorious sun shining it will remain dark. In the same way we need to have the desire to be helped and then we will turn to Tara, and after that we will have a quick response from Tara.

### **Becoming Tara**

I explained the Tara visualisation meditation procedure or process a number of times now and we have done group guided meditation practice. At one stage if you can recall all the Taras dissolve into you. The main purpose of the dissolution of Tara into you is to bring instant and dramatic purification, whereby all the defilements of body speech and mind and karmic defilements are all cleared and gone, then Tara dissolves into you and yourself transforms into Tara. The transformation of yourself from the pristine state of reality into Tara, that is the key purpose of the visualisation practice.

With the type of body that we have, it is so prone to so many things: it is brittle, susceptible, vulnerable, easily broken, easily heated, and easily frozen. In other words, we suffer too easily. Amidst these sufferings we are not able to use the body and mind effectively. Therefore, why not get rid of this body and take on a new body, the body of Tara, the form of Tara? Then, as you do the visualisation of yourself arising in the form of Tara as described before, you could have this confidence that your old self is gone and a new Tara is born. And then have a sense of strong confidence and pride that, "Now indeed I am Tara."

With regard to the laser-like light rays carrying the mantra OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA at their tips which dissolve into you, the mantra actually comes from the syllable TAM – the seed syllable of Tara – which is at Tara's heart. It is from TAM at the heart of Tara that laser-like light rays come, charged with the mantra. It dissolves into you and all sentient beings. After that, purification takes place; after that Tara dissolves into you and you become Tara. But according to the second way of doing it, following the dissolution of mantric light rays into one and all sentient beings from TAM, and

purifying sentient beings, the light rays are absorbed back into the TAM at the heart of Tara. Next, then the bodies of Tara dissolve into you. We haven't done the light rays going back to the TAM.

When we have Tara puja there are offerings for the self-generation deity and therefore when offering to the self-generated deity, offerings begin from the right of oneself visualised as the deity. Offerings begin from right to the left. If you also happen to have the counterpart front-generated deity, offerings of sense objects start from your left, but from the right of the front-generated deities.

The sense offerings are based on ancient Indian tradition. For example, any of the eight offerings begins with the two waters: water for rinsing mouth and for the feet. Because in India in the past when guests were invited, water was offered first to cool down, to rinse mouth or drink; and to cool their feet, which would have walked some distance. The first two offerings are water.

*[End of formal teaching, continued to explanation of the hand mudras for offering]*